



Senior Stars Emerge in Olympia

Lauren Moughon, AARP Washington Advocacy Director

Faced with a nearly \$3 billion state budget gap, a number of painful cuts were made in the 2003 state legislative session. Fortunately, a few dedicated and tireless legislators stood firmly by Washington's older adults and emerged as "senior stars." Perhaps the most visible were those who fought to bring down rising prescription drug prices.

Representative Eileen Cody (D-Seattle) has championed prescription drug reform legislation for several years. A dedicated nurse and chair of the House Health Care Committee, Rep. Cody was the "head coach" of a team of legislators, lobbyists, and seniors across the state who fought to pass prescription drug reform. Under her leadership, a meaningful compromise bill – Senate Bill 6088 – passed during the first special session.

In the Senate, a number of leaders stepped up to the plate on prescription drug reform, but none with more courage and conviction than **Senator Alex Deccio** (R-Yakima). As chair of the Senate Health and Long-term Care Committee, Sen. Deccio negotiated behind the scenes, ensuring the carefully crafted compromise bill would make a meaningful difference for seniors. In addition, success wouldn't have been possible without the strong support and hard work of two other Senate leaders – **Senator Pat Thibaudeau** (D-Seattle) and **Senator Shirley Winsley** (R-Fircrest).

Seniors also had a great stake in issues outside prescription drug reform this session, and two legislators stood out as senior stars for their leadership.

Senator Dino Rossi (R-Sammamish), Chair of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, took a stand for seniors in his budget proposal by restoring funding to a number of critical programs. Senator Rossi's budget fully funded the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman, ensuring the program could continue its mission to protect vulnerable adults from abuse and neglect. His budget also restored partial funding for adult vision, hearing, and dental care under Medicaid for the neediest Washington seniors, and rejected some cuts to nursing home reimbursement rates. Washington seniors are grateful for Sen. Dino Rossi's leadership in 2003.

Rep. Dawn Morrell (D-Puyallup) could be considered Washington seniors' "Rookie of the Year." Though it was her first legislative session, Rep. Morrell fought like a veteran, arguing with conviction and passion for prescription drug reform and improvements to the long-term care system. As a nurse, Rep. Morrell knows firsthand the consequences of allowing Washington's health care system to erode – and how those consequences disproportionately impact seniors and children.

If you care about the cost of prescription drugs, the quality of long-term care for disabled seniors, elder abuse and neglect, and health care for those in need, these leaders have earned your gratitude. Please take a moment to call the toll-free legislative hotline at 1-800-562-6000 today and offer them your thanks.

Lauren Moughon is the Advocacy Director for AARP Washington. AARP is a non-profit, non-partisan membership organization for people 50 and older.